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# CHILD CARE FOR BRITISH COLUMBIA

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## MINISTER'S MESSAGE

As the new government of Premier Dosanjh moves to reconnect with the values of all British Columbians, I am pleased to release the results of a province-wide consultation of more than 10,000 citizens on the future of child care in our province.

We asked British Columbians to tell us their ideas and views on the direction we should be going in, and the child care options we should be pursuing as a province. The response to that five-month consultation was overwhelming. British Columbians consider child care to be a fundamentally important issue. And, they want the federal and provincial governments to support the creation of an affordable, quality child care system that all families can access.

This document includes a summary of the findings of the consultation, and outlines the next important steps we are taking to address B.C.'s child care challenges.

We are building a comprehensive, quality child care system that meets the diverse needs of B.C. However, our government can not accomplish this task alone. All of us – parents, child care providers, employers, educators and communities – must play a part.

We can all take pride in our province's accomplishments in improving the lives of children since 1992. Initiatives such as the school lunch program, the BC Family Bonus and Healthy Kids.

Over the past eight years, we have worked with parents and communities to improve the accessibility and affordability of the province's child care system by implementing innovative new programs and greatly increasing the budget. The number of children receiving a child care subsidy has more than doubled since 1992.

While there have been many accomplishments, much more work remains to be done. I look forward to joining with British Columbians as we build a better future for all our children.

Jan Pullinger  
Minister



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CHILD CARE FOR BRITISH COLUMBIA

## CHILD CARE FOR BRITISH COLUMBIA

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### THE CHALLENGES

The care parents provide is the foundation on which our children build their lives. But changes in family structures, the economy and the workplace over the last couple of decades have placed additional pressures on both parents and children.

Today, there are more lone-parent families (primarily headed by women) than ever before, while in at least 84 per cent of all Canadian families there are now two working adults. Many parents, who in the past would have asked a relative to care for their children informally, now can no longer do so because their mothers, sisters and aunts are also working. The result — ever greater numbers of families depend on outside care for their children.

At the same time, changing job markets and federal cutbacks to social expenditures have made it harder for working families to get ahead. Access to appropriate, affordable child care is a major factor in working parents' ability to succeed in the labour market and gain economic security for their families.

However, many working families are having difficulty finding and affording the child care they need. A 1997 province-wide Parent Child Care Needs Assessment survey, funded through the joint Canada/British Columbia Child Care Strategic Initiative, found that for 31 per cent of parents, child care-related issues interfered with their ability to either seek employment, remain in the paid labour market, or pursue education or training. The two most frequently cited barriers to accessing child care services were that child care is too expensive and that child care is unavailable during the hours when needed.

One area of need parents have is for more quality child care for their school-age children before and after school.

The issue of "latch key" children who may spend hours at home without adult supervision while their parents are working is of growing concern in our society. Unsupervised children, on average, are more likely to experience a range of problems including higher absentee rates at school; lower academic test scores; and higher levels of fear, stress, nightmares, loneliness and boredom.

For parents, the stress of worrying about their unsupervised children at home can affect their ability to concentrate on the job.

*Children who receive quality  
child care are more likely to  
complete secondary school  
and participate in post-  
secondary education and are  
less likely to commit crimes  
or face teen pregnancies.*

*-McCain, M., and Mustard, F.  
Early Years Study, April 1999*

## **CONSULTING WITH BRITISH COLUMBIANS**

In response to the many challenges facing child care, the Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security released a discussion paper on October 21, 1999 called Building a Better Future for British Columbia's Kids. The discussion paper outlined a range of possible child care options and invited all British Columbians to respond and give their recommendations.

*The better the care and stimulation a child receives, the greater the benefit for the national economy as well as the child. UNICEF, the State of the World's Children, 1999*

On January 10, 2000 the government released an interim report on the results of the consultation. More than 7,200 British Columbians had responded by that time. The deadline was then extended to February 29, 2000 at the request of communities who asked for more time to provide feedback. In all, over 10,000 British Columbians responded to the paper.

The overwhelming majority (94 per cent) of respondents saw child care as an urgent issue and favoured more resources and support for child care by the federal and provincial governments. Most respondents, too, felt that further actions by the government to make the current child care system more affordable and accessible would be merely stopgap measures. Instead, 90 per cent recommended that the provincial and federal governments go further and commit to a publicly funded child care system.

## TAKING ACTION

### A first step

The government of B.C. has listened carefully to the recommendations of British Columbians and is acting on those recommendations.

The 2000/01 provincial budget, released on March 27, 2000, commits the government to work towards publicly funded child care for B.C. and sets out British Columbia's first step in that direction — a new initiative to support safe, affordable before- and after-school care.

This initiative is about the safety of our children, the quality of their care and the affordability for parents.

It will help more working parents to better their skills, improve their education and earn a better living, secure in the knowledge that their children are in good hands before, during and after school.

*We need to make sure we don't forget our school-age children, before and after school. It is key to ensuring their safety—It could allow for a seamless day to have them on school sites. —from parent responding to the Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security child care discussion paper.*

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*For every \$1 spent on quality child care, \$2 are saved in the long-term. (Cleveland, G. and Krashinski, M., *The Benefits and Costs of Good Child Care*, March 1998)*

*For high-risk children, every \$1 spent on quality child care saves \$7 in the long-term. (Schweinhart, L.J., *The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study Through Age 27*, 1983; McCain, M. and Mustard, F. *Early Years Study*, April 1999)*

Beginning January 1, 2001 families seeking before- and after-school care for their children will be able to access publicly funded, licensed spaces on and off school sites.

All licensed not for non-profit and for-profit child-care organizations providing before- and after-school care will receive grants from the province to maintain and expand existing spaces for children from grade one up to age 12. The service will be available during the school year at a cost to parents of \$7 a day and \$14 a day for school holidays.

The province has budgeted \$14 million for 2000/01 and \$30 million for 2001/02 to fund over 20,000 spaces for school-age children around the province under this initiative.

Currently, the government is working with school boards, school districts, staff, parents and child care providers to develop a plan for implementing this new initiative as prudently and cost-efficiently as possible.

The hours children spend outside school are critical to their healthy physical and emotional growth. Good quality before- and after- school care can help children improve their social skills, find new interests, and improve their abilities in a variety of areas. These experiences can lead to higher achievement in school and to life-long success.

This initiative to publicly fund before- and after- school care will put more B.C. children at an advantage.

With this action, B.C. becomes only the second jurisdiction in North America to move to publicly funded child care. It brings our province in line with actions undertaken in many European countries over the past 50 years.

## **WHAT'S NEXT?**

*Many social programs support families but child care is the backbone of them all. The provincial and federal governments must go further and make a commitment to a publicly funded system that entitles ALL children to access affordable quality early childhood services. - (From a child care discussion paper response letter signed by 7,682 individuals and organizations throughout province.)*

The introduction of publicly funded, licensed before- and after-school care is an important first step in the right direction.

The B.C. government is committed to going further to expand beyond school-age child care and to provide affordable child care to younger and younger children across the province, as the budget permits.

The long-term goal is a comprehensive, publicly funded child care system for this province that meets the needs of British Columbians.

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This is not a goal B.C. can reach overnight. Achieving it is likely to take many years and a great deal of work.

In partnership with parents, child care providers and others, the government will continue to move forward to implement a made-in-B.C. approach tailored to the diverse needs of children, families and communities.

Here in British Columbia, we are taking action to build a comprehensive quality, affordable child care system that works — for all B.C. families.

*"I would like to think that the days of the nuclear family struggling alone with an impossible burden is passing and that we are returning to the realization that it does in fact take a village to raise a child." — grandmother,*

*Mainland/Southwest Region*

*"As Building a Better Future points out, child care is a shared responsibility. Parents, the community, labour, the corporate sector, and government all have a role to play."*

*— Provincial Health Officer*

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

### BACKGROUND

On October 21, 1999, the Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security released a discussion paper called Building a Better Future for British Columbia's Kids, and invited all British Columbians to respond to the ideas and proposals contained in it.

### RESPONSES/PARTICIPANTS

In all, the ministry heard from a total of 10,631 people, either directly through individual written responses, or indirectly through their participation in group consultations.

- Form Letters (16 versions): 8,635
- Non-Form Letters: 950
  - (includes mail in and e-mail letters, as well as multiple signature letters)
- Fill-in Feedback Forms (two versions): 68
- Consultation Participants: 978
  - City of Vancouver- sponsored Think Tanks (28 in total): 600
  - Nanaimo Area Child Care Consultations: 109
  - Immigrant Services Society of BC: 60
  - Early Childhood Educators of BC (three branches): 60
  - Working Group on Poverty: 55
  - Collingwood Neighbourhood House: 45
  - Philippine Women Centre of BC/Grassroots
  - Women's Discussion Group: 30
  - Richmond Child Care Development Board: 19

## COMMUNITIES/RESPONDENTS

Responses came from British Columbians from every geographic region and from 174 different communities.

In addition, we heard from:

- more than 150 local community and provincial organizations, including:
  - BC Association for Community Living
  - Adoptive Families Association of British Columbia
  - BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils
  - BC Association of Child Care Services
  - BC Institute Against Family Violence
  - BC/Yukon Society of Transition Houses
  - Immigrant Services Society of BC
  - BC Aboriginal Child Care Society
  - Provincial Child Care Council
  - Early Childhood Educators of British Columbia
  - Vancouver Board of Trade
- 11 unions, among them:
  - CAW-Canada
  - Canadian Union of Public Employees
    - BC Division
  - BC Federation of Labour
  - Hospital Employees' Union
  - BC Government and Service Employees' Union
- 11 school districts and two elementary schools, as well as the BC School Superintendents' Association
- 13 local governments
- 11 academics and eight doctors
- two health regions, three health societies and the Provincial Health Officer.

### **Responses: This Summary**

The majority of respondents and consultation participants do not directly address the actions proposed in the discussion paper. Instead, they write generally about how important child care is to them and what they believe should be done right now to improve the current child care system. These comments are catalogued under 'Major Themes,' below.

The next section, 'Other Themes,' lists additional concerns or ideas that appear repeatedly in individual letters and/or group consultations (in order of total number of mentions).

Where respondents/participants have discussed the specific actions proposed, their very definitely mixed views are listed in the final section under 'Direct Responses to the Discussion Paper Options.'

### **Major Themes**

#### **URGENT ISSUE**

The vast majority of respondents see child care as an urgent issue and support the Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security's commitment to improve child care in British Columbia.

**Total: 9,947 or 94 per cent**

"The situation is urgent and our children can't wait."

— form letter sent in by 7,682 British Columbians

"Put children first. It makes sense."

— parent, Vancouver Island/Coast region

#### **PUBLICLY FUNDED SYSTEM**

In addition, the majority of respondents ask the provincial and federal government to commit to a publicly funded child care system.

**Total: 9,540 or 90 per cent**

"It takes courage to stand together as a society and ask for monumental change, but we must have that courage so that ALL children have access to quality early childhood experiences."

— *Nanaimo Area Child Care Consultations*

A publicly funded child care system is supported by, among others:

- the Canadian Union of Public Employees, BC Division
- the BC Federation of Labour
- the Hospital Employees' Union, and its 45,000 members
- Prince George and District Labour Council, and its 10,000 members
- the Early Childhood Educators of BC
- the BC Government and Service Employees' Union and its 60,000 members, and
- the End Legislated Poverty Coalition, representing 40 community groups.

Close to 400 respondents specifically suggest that the B.C. government "develop and implement a five-year plan that moves child care from the current user fee system to one that is publicly funded," and link all short-term measures to this plan.

"I know I am not alone in this struggle. But I feel alone. I sincerely hope that something concrete results from this discussion paper so that other families may benefit from a universal program that meets the changing needs of parents and children today."

— parent, Capital Regional District

#### **END STOPGAP MEASURES**

Most form-letter respondents see the discussion paper's proposals for action — designed to make the current child care system more affordable and accessible — as stopgap measures only.

**Total: 8,720 or 82 per cent**

"While immediate action to make child care more affordable and accessible will be welcomed by many, these are only stopgap measures. The provincial and federal governments must go further and make a commitment to a publicly funded system that entitles ALL children to access affordable, quality early childhood services."

— *form letter sent in by 7,682 British Columbians.*

### INCREASE SPENDING/INVEST IN THE EARLY YEARS

Tied in with these first three themes is a call for the B.C. and federal governments to develop budgets with significantly increased spending and investment in child care and the early years.

**Total: 8,327 or 78 per cent**

"For the future of everyone, budget for quality child care."

— parent, Cariboo region

### AFFORDABILITY

Parents, child care providers and community representatives alike repeatedly stress the difficulties B.C. families face in affording child care.

**Total: 9,347 or 88 per cent**

"The more a parent has to worry about surviving,  
the less capable they will be at providing loving  
support to their kids."

— parent, sent in by e-mail, no location given

### ACCESSIBILITY

In many areas of the province, parents are unable to access the child care they need — simply not enough spaces (particularly in infant/toddler care), or the times available are wrong, etc. For most respondents, 'accessibility' means being able to access the child care you need, where and when you need it.

**Total: 9,063 or 85 per cent**

### QUALITY

The quality of the care provided (for most, 'quality' signifies a safe, secure and stimulating environment) is a vital issue to the majority of parents and child care providers.

**Total: 8,809 or 83 per cent**

### Other Themes

- Child care must be flexible. Families need child care that is available when they need it (extended hours and weekends, part time and drop in, emergency), and sensitive to specific needs (aboriginal, ethnic, immigrant, inner city, special needs): 909

"Three key issues are at the core of all the challenges related to childcare in B.C. — affordability, accessibility and flexibility of child care services to meet the diverse needs of families."

— *City of Vancouver-sponsored Think Tanks*

- Single parents and families with low incomes face particular challenges in paying for child care (even with the subsidy) in addition to such basics as food, shelter and clothing: 772

"Everyday in my work with children, I see parents struggling to give their children the best that they can offer, often with resources that are stretched and extremely limited. My heart goes out to children who so obviously do not have many advantages in life that others take for granted."

— *child care provider, Thompson/Okanagan region*

- Any child care planning must include children with special needs; the Supported Child Care program is valuable and must not be lost: 451

"Sadly, these children end up being forgotten by the system."

— parent, Thompson/Okanagan region

- We need a comprehensive public education/awareness program — primarily directed at parents — to cover such topics as finding and recognizing quality child care, the importance of the early years and general parenting skills: 175

"The general public, including employers, labour unions, and those who believe they have no personal stake in the lives of young children, must be made aware of the critical social and emotional skills learned in early childhood and of the consequences, for both the child and society, if those skills are not acquired."

— Powell River Child Care Council

- Provide support for stay-at-home parents, either instead of or in addition to improving the current system:

Provide a tax break or other incentive to encourage more parents to stay at home with their children: 110

"The best caregivers for their children are the parents. Many more parents would opt to stay at home to care for their children if they had some financial help."

— parent, Kootenay region

Improve the current child care system for the people who need it and provide a tax break or subsidy for those who would like to stay-at-home: 64

"While I agree that affordable, good quality daycare should be available for all families that require it, children of stay at home parents should not be excluded when discussing the future of our children."

— parent, Lower Mainland/ Southwest region

- Child care is a shared responsibility; we need to build partnerships among all levels of government, business, labour, communities, parents: 148

"As Building a Better Future points out, child care is a shared responsibility. Parents, the community, labour, the corporate sector, and government all have a role to play."

— Provincial Health Officer

- The federal government should follow through on its promise of a National Child Care Policy: 124
- The B.C. government should merge all child-related programs and services into one ministry: 93
- None of this information is new; we need less talk and more action — stop the studies: 80
- Middle-income earners face their own considerable challenges — not eligible for subsidy, but cannot easily afford child care: 67

"I consider myself part of the working poor. My husband and me do not qualify for any subsidies, nor do we receive tax benefits. Raising our boys continues to be a financial struggle. We opted out of the professional child care services available because we cannot afford them. Instead we are fortunate to have a grandmother to be the caregiver of our children when necessary."

— parent, Greater Vancouver Regional District

- Child care needs to fit within a comprehensive family policy that includes the full range of programs and services required by B.C. children and families: 50
- Children are their parents' responsibility, not government's, and parents should be solely responsible for their care: 44

### **Direct Responses to the Discussion Paper Options**

#### **REDUCING THE DIRECT COST OF CHILD CARE FOR LOW- AND MODEST-INCOME PARENTS**

A large number of respondents — 907 — generally support changing or improving the current child care system to reduce the direct cost of child care, but do not give specifics.

Of those who do give specifics:

- 635 support raising income thresholds
- 495 support reducing the clawback
- 401 support raising subsidy rates to reflect the true or real cost of child care
- 30 support improving access and systems development, and
- 64 speak in general terms about 'expanding eligibility.'

"Increasing the subsidy rate would dramatically reduce family poverty."

— *Community Care Facilities Licensing Officer,  
Thompson/Okanagan region*

Other respondents have different ideas for changing and improving the current system:

- 135 believe the child care subsidy should be provided for licensed child care only; unlicensed, unregulated child care providers should not receive it.
- 58 would like the child care subsidy to cover the actual number of days children attend child care each month, which may often be more than the 20 allowed under the subsidy program.

However, a total of 546 do not support making changes to the subsidy system:

- 327 believe increasing subsidy rates will most likely lead to an increase in fees
- 319 feel it will make no difference to the large number of families who are not eligible for the subsidy now, and who will remain ineligible even with proposed changes
- 151 think it will provide only short-term relief and will not address issues of cost, quality, and access, and
- 45 suggest that the subsidy system is limited and complex, and should be re-examined.

#### **INCREASING FUNDING TO CHILD CARE PROVIDERS**

In all, 913 people — equal numbers of parents and caregivers — believe in general that child care providers should receive more funding.

Many of the parents mention the importance of the work child care providers do, and that they should be paid a wage closer to their real value. Many child care providers mention how difficult it is to continue to work in a profession they love, but that does not provide them with a living wage.

Of those who mentioned specific wage or program proposals:

- 92 support further progress in the Compensation Contribution Program
- 65 support reducing the waitlist for the Infant/Toddler Incentive Grant to zero
- 15 would like to see Capital Grants expanded to satisfy demand.

"I love my career but due to the wages, my son and I live in poverty."

— *parent and early childhood educator,  
Greater Vancouver Regional District*

"Caregivers should be paid what they are worth."

— *parent, Thompson/Okanagan region*

#### **MORE SUPPORT TO PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS**

82 people would like to see more support for parents and caregivers; 479 specifically support the idea of expanding the number and scope of Child Care Resource and Referral Programs.

"We must rethink the way we support parents to provide the quality care their children need to grow into healthy and well-adjusted contributing members of our society."

— *School District # 52 (Prince Rupert)*

#### **INCREASING THE NUMBER OF LICENSED CHILD CARE SPACES ON SCHOOL SITES**

A total of 735 people support the idea of increasing the number of licensed child care spaces on school sites.

"We need to make sure we don't forget our school-age children, before and after school. It is key to ensuring their safety. It could allow for a seamless day to have them on school sites."

— *parent, feedback form, no location given*

"Having a day care on site at school is invaluable.  
There are no worries about safety or transportation,  
security or comfort for the children."

*-parent, Capital Regional District*

But an additional 21 people do not agree with this idea, with 11 fearing that these new programs will adversely affect child care programs already operating near school sites.

Over 800 British Columbians mention that the real need is simply to increase the number of spaces — whether on school sites or not — particularly for infant/toddler and school-age care.

On the specific idea of using surplus portables to increase licensed spaces, only 14 respondents agree without reservation. An additional 338 agree that using portables for child care will create more spaces but, without operating funds, these spaces will be no more affordable, stable or financially viable than existing child care programs.

The following are some of the concerns expressed about using portables for child care:

- if the structures are considered unsuitable for classroom use, they would be equally unsuitable for child care programs
- the use of portables will be confusing for the public, since the pressure has been on school districts to get rid of portables
- their use could further reduce outdoor playground space
- portables are prone to fungal conditions — a solution that may not meet licensing requirements
- more consultation is needed.

### KEEPING YOUNG PARENTS IN SCHOOL

553 people generally support an increase in funding to keep more young parents in school; 32 specifically support increasing funding for existing Young Parent Programs to \$850.00 per space.

"This Program has helped my son to grow and learn. It also has given my son interaction with other children. It has encouraged me to go back to school. It has given me a future!"

— *young parent, Thompson/Okanagan region*

More than 150 would also like to see more Young Parent Programs added, while several also ask for stable block funding.

Four people are opposed to increased funding for young parents. Most of these respondents believe that the young people should be responsible for their own actions and that their child care shouldn't be at taxpayers' expense.

### CREATING FAMILY FRIENDLY WORKPLACES

554 people support the idea of business and labour working together to create family friendly workplaces. Five do not support the idea, believing that it will significantly increase the cost of doing business.

### ENHANCING MATERNITY/PARENTAL LEAVE

614 respondents support the federal government's plans to enhance maternity and parental leave, particularly the extension of benefits to one year. Ten people do not support this measure, with several saying it is too expensive.

"We need quality, affordable daycare. We need enhanced maternity leave and parental leave. Supporting families is good for everyone."

*— registered nurse, Nechako region*

#### **ESTABLISHING SCHOOL-BASED ONE-STOP ACCESS CENTRES FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES**

339 people would like to see more One-Stop Access Centres for children and family services, although they are divided over whether they should be on school sites only, or in other neighbourhood locations. 157 think communities should be able to plan their own model.